

MAY 28, 1981

There's no way of keeping this deal a secret. The principals representing the State of Texas aren't aware of what they are doing and it's my supposition that the citizens have been misled. One thing I will predict that once the news spreads, every walnut game artist and every bogus bridge salesman in the nation is going to long for a charter to operate in Texas. But before I get too far ahead, I'd better give you the story.

Eight or nine years ago, the head of a big oil company started trying to sell his 190,000 acre ranch down in the Big Bend part of the Rio Grande to the State of Texas for a park. It's one of those rough, rocky outfits that's broke more herders and loan companies than Vegas has corrupted in equal amounts. Big Bend Park, as you probably know, is also close to the general area. In my opinion, the major contribution of the whole system has been to create a coyote and panther hatchery to complement a drug pipeline out of Mexico for smugglers. But to be sort of fair, I admit that I always take the rancher's side of an issue as long as it's not too unprofitable to be associated with the cause at hand.

Anyhow, the state didn't buy the oilman's ranch. We'd forgotten the deal here in the Shortgrass Country. Then all of a sudden a short time ago, we began to read and hear that the same fossil fuel miner had cooked up a trade to swap his 190,000 acre place for an equal amount of land out close to El Paso that belonged to the University of Texas. (The U. of T. has two million or so acres of land to support the colleges of the system.)

He was justified in making the move. The El Paso tract not only joined one of his other ranches, but does in good years have excellent stands of grama grass. Now I am not touting that El Paso country as being a wonderland; however, compared to the nutrients found in the air and the rocks close to the river, it's a far better country to own. As far as that goes, you don't have to take my word about the difference. Land in 1980 in the park area went for \$42.50 an acre, while a sale in El Paso section was a hundred and ninety-two bucks.

In fact, that's where I became excited. I had lost interest in the trade. I knew it was too late to stop the Governor and the Lieutenant Governor from pressuring the Legislature into okaying the swap. After all, those guys are oilmen themselves. They know more about trading with their colleagues than a herder ever will. Our Governor owns rigs and such like. He ought to be real capable in the hocus-pocus those fellows use to turn dry holes into big rolls of cash.

My idea was to find the real estate salesman who'd made the \$42.50 sale on the river country and give him unlimited power of attorney over the state treasury. I figured that as talented as he's bound to be, the next time a fellow tried to leave us the short end of a swap by, say, 25 or 30 million bucks, we'd just unleash our state treasurer and turn that much coin toward our coffers.

Oh, I did try to talk to some of the state senators and their aides. But a spring cool had hit their conversation on the topic of trading off school lands, and all I netted was a big phone bill.

Before you pack up to come down here to do some trading, I want to warn you that not everyone in Texas is that easy. Given the time to find that real estate genius, we may make a comeback. Just don't be too hard on us.

Everybody makes mistakes when they come down with land trading fever,
especially land that belongs to the state schools.